

The History and Status in Britain of *Cosmiotes consortella* (Stainton, 1851) (*exiguella* Frey, 1885)  
(Lep.: Elachistidae)

By A. M. EMMET \*

*Elachista consortella* was named by Stainton from several specimens captured by Logan in March, 1850 near King Arthur's Seat, Edinburgh (V.c.82). Morris (1872) added Headley Lane, Surrey (V.c.17) as a locality and June-July as additional months for its occurrence; Headley Lane, Stainton's "sanctum sanctorum" of entomologists, lies in the ten-kilometre square which today holds records of more lepidoptera than any other in the British Isles. Meyrick (1895) added Westmorland and east Ireland to the distribution pattern, but in his revised edition (1928), he degraded *E. consortella* to synonymy with *E. nigrella* (Hübner.). Thereafter the species disappeared from our literature, though Waters (1928) recorded the capture in April, 1927 at Ventnor, Isle of Wight of *E. nigrella*, "mostly of the form described as *E. consortella* in the first edition of Mr. Meyrick's Handbook".

Bradley (1952) introduced *Elachista exiguella* Frey as a species new to the British list on the evidence of a specimen taken between the 3rd and 8th of June, 1951 in the Burren, Co. Clare (V.c.H.9). The second British record under the name *E. exiguella* was captured at Tresco, Isles of Scilly (V.c.1) between the 29th of June and the 6th of July, 1957 (Richardson & Mere, 1958). The third, again from Ireland, was taken at Glenmore, Co. Kilkenny (V.c.H.11) on the 27th of April, 1965 (Mere & Pelham-Clinton, 1966).

Bradley (1966) found *Elachista consortella* and *E. exiguella* to be synonymous and, in compliance with the Rule of Priority, sank *exiguella* as a junior synonym of *consortella*.

Bradley & Pelham-Clinton (1967) recorded the capture in the Burren of "a few" further specimens of *Cosmiotes consortella*, using a combination not previously found in our literature. Chalmers-Hunt (1970) recorded a ♀ taken on the 21st of July 1967, at Port Erin, Isle of Man (V.c.71). Emmet (1972) recorded a specimen taken in 1969 at Ballyconneely, Co. Galway (V.c.H.16). As far as is known, there is no subsequent reference in our journals.

The British collection in the British Museum (Natural History) contains only three specimens recognised as *C. consortella*, the first Burren example (see above), and two taken by Mr. W. G. Tremewan on the 24th of April, 1955 at Gwithian, Cornwall (V.c.1). Mr. E. C. Pelham-Clinton (*in litt.*) reports that he has additional specimens from West Lothian (V.c.83) and South Kerry (V.c.H.1). Mr. J. M. Chalmers-Hunt has a ♀ taken on the 2nd June 1957 at Halling, Kent (V.c.16) (gen. det. E. C. Pelham-Clinton).

The history of the species in Britain gives the impression that it has a predominantly northern and western distribution, but this is not necessarily the case. Suspecting that I had taken

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specimens in Essex both of *C. consortella* and *C. freyerella* (Hübner) (*nigrella* (Hübner) nec (Fabricius)), I submitted some

of them to Mr. E. C. Pelham-Clinton, who pronounced three to be *C. consortella*; these bear the following data: Tiptree Heath, 3.vii.77, Great Sampford, 19.v.78 and Hadstock, 29.v.78 (all V.c.19). To these I add three (possibly four specimens taken at Benfleet (V.c.18) on 28.iv.66. Though this material is statistically insufficient, the indications are that the two *Cosmiotes* species are equally common in the county. If other microlepidopterists were to examine their series of "*Elachista nigrella*", they well might find that they possess both species. Should this be the case, the records should be published to give a clearer picture of the distribution pattern.

The differences between the species are described by Traugott-Olsen & Schmidt Neilsen (1977). Compared with *C. freyerella*, *C. consortella* is generally smaller, has the forewing lighter grey and the median fascia more obscure; the frons is shining pale beige as opposed to sordid white and the neck-tufts are mottled with darker-tipped scales as opposed to being uniform brownish grey. The most obvious difference in the male genitalia lies in a spine at the distal end of the sacculus; in *C. freyerella* it is free and distinct, whereas in *C. consortella* it is appressed to the sacculus. If the scales are brushed from the tip of the abdomen, this character can usually be seen under high magnification without the dissection of the specimen.

The life history of *C. consortella* is unknown. Dates of capture (March-May, June-July, September) show that it is double- or triple-brooded. The habitat is open grassland, often on calcareous ground. *C. freyerella* feeds mainly on *Poa* spp. and *C. consortella* may do so likewise. I have a fortuitously bred specimen in my collection acquired in the following circumstances. In a series of collecting notes contributed to the AES Bulletin, I stated that elachistid larvae did not spin cocoons but pupated under a girdle like many species of butterfly (Emmet, 1970). Mr. J. L. Gregory of St. Austell, Cornwall (V.c.2) rightly took me to task for overgeneralisation, since he had bred elachistids from cocoons. On the 1st of April 1971 he wrote to me as follows (slightly adapted): "The enclosed moth has just emerged (yesterday)—another cocoon-making *Elachista*! The cocoon was on the lid of a jar which was being used by my six-year-old daughter to rear some grass-feeding noctuids. The foodplant was probably *Poa* but might have been *Holcus*. I could not find the mine." The moth arrived alive and in perfect condition. At the time, following Meyrick, I misidentified it as *Elachista nigrella*. February is likely to be the best month to look for the first generation of larvae, which should not be too difficult to find.

Abroad, *C. consortella* has been recorded from Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, South Spain and South Italy.

I am grateful to Mr. E. C. Pelham-Clinton for the identification of specimens and advice. I have drawn information freely from Traugott-Olsen & Schmidt Neilsen (*loc. cit.*).

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## OBITUARY

## WILLIAM EDWARD BUSBRIDGE

William Edward Busbridge (known to many as Buzz) was born in London on 27th July 1904, and died suddenly from a heart attack on 30th September 1978. He was the son of William Reginald Busbridge who became Station Master at Dover Marine in 1918, and as such was the holder of many foreign decorations given by crowned heads as they passed through the port.

After attending school in Dover he, like his father, joined the Railway and was a clerical officer in London throughout his career, except for the 1939-1945 War, in which he served in the army.

Busbridge was a keen collector of lepidoptera and observer of bird life. He spent most of his leave in the country and much of his collecting was done around Dover in the 1920's and 1930's, and later at Sevenoaks where he lived after the war. Probably the best insect he ever took was at Atchester Wood, Stelling near Elham on 6th June 1930. This was the very rare ab. *fuscaria* Prout of the Orange Moth (*Angerona prunaria* L.), which specimen is now in the RCK collection in the BMNH.

Latterly he lived alone in an hotel — he was never married — and became interested in chess, becoming Hon. Secretary of the Hastings and St. Leonards Chess Club. He had no near relatives but will be sadly missed by his many friends.— G. H. YOU DEN.